

Albany “Carbon” Tax - What do you Think?

If you are an Albany resident, you may have received a phone call in February or March asking survey questions about several possible tax measures. A lucky sampling of 352 people had their dinners interrupted to provide their opinions in the [Sales Tax Measure Feasibility Survey](#). Among the several potential tax measures presented, participants were asked about their level of support for funding the city’s [Climate Action Plan](#) (CAP) through an increase in the Utility User Tax (UUT).

The UUT is a line item on your PG&E bill, and is currently 7% in Albany. Sustainability Committee has proposed increasing the UUT by 2% to provide funding specifically to implement the CAP. A 2% increase would raise more than \$247,000 per year for the City of Albany to dedicate directly to CAP implementation projects. Such projects might include energy efficiency retrofits, improving pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, water conservation measures, and urban agriculture, to name a few.

The survey results were a mixed bag. A slim majority (51.9%) supported a UUT – and a 2/3 majority vote would be needed to pass the measure. But the way the question was presented left doubt about whether the presentation of further information about the UUT would have changed survey outcomes. For example, in the survey the UUT was described as tax “on gas and electricity” – perhaps leaving respondents thinking it would be a gasoline tax (it is not, it would be on electricity and natural gas). Also, the proposal would raise the average Albany household’s utility bill by only \$21 per year. But respondents were only told that the UUT would be raised by 2%, and were not told what the average impact would be in dollars.

The City’s Sustainability Committee sent a [letter](#) to City Council encouraging them to place the UUT increase on the ballot despite the modest survey results. [At the time of writing this article, it appears that City Council has decided to punt the issue into the next election cycle, two years hence.](#)

So, what are your thoughts on raising the UUT to fund projects that would reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Albany? Is it a good approach to addressing a pressing environmental issue? What percent of Albany voters do you think would support the tax if presented on the ballot in November? And what do you think of City Council’s decision on the matter?

Comment [DL1]: An email from Preston Jordan indicated the issue was killed by keeping it off the agenda, including for this Monday's meeting, which is the last at which it could have been considered for the November ballot.